Ray and Pep Martin's Leesburg Visit

Monday, January 12, 1988, we went to see Mr. Ben Young, who lives on U.S. 19, the main road from Albany to Leesburg, about a half mile from the tracks in Leesburg, on the left side.

The first day he took us to a house directly across the road from him. It belongs to some Basses who live there. They are probably related to us. About a city block closer to town on the same side is the white house, trimmed in brick, where Delia Godwin, our grandmother, lived with "Raz" Godwin, our step grand-dad and the Pope and Godwin children.

Diagonally across the street, on the southwest corner of Kinchafonee Drive, was another white frame house with brick columns supporting the roof of the front porch. Here some Godwins lived. We later learned that an old lady lives there and that the attic contains some papers on Godwin family histories.

On the road to the cemetery, but still in town, was an ancient frame house of some historic (local) interest (Ben Young could elaborate on this). Mrs. Delia Godwin lived there and kept a boarding house for travelers and locals.

We visited the Pope lot in the Leesburg Cemetery and failed to help Ben identify some of the bodies in unmarked graves. (Interesting is the fact that three Mary Frances Pope's are buried there.) They were John H. Pope's wife, their never-married daughter and the young daughter of Robert F. Pope and Emma (Deese).

We made our way out of town on the Leslie Road to the chehaw monument and then on to the old Pope plantation grounds. After running the metal detector over the site of the former "Pope house" (lots of nails and little else found), we travelled on to the area, off N.Y. Road of lot #142, which was divided among the heirs of Mary Frances Gilbert Pope. Here was located the "small farm" that our grandmother lived on when "Raz" Godwin wrote her to propose marriage shortly after our grandfather James Chandler Pope died, in 1896. Back in the woods there, w found the grave of an unknown. His marble marker had sculptured the name of A.B. Booker 1856-1918.

We drove then back to Leslie Road and turned north to a point where it is joined by the Old Leslie Road. Here at the "Heath Place", which had once belonged to Col. Henry Pope's niece Lucy Bartlett, we found another old white frame dwelling Black people in the area call it the old Pope Place. We later got this same story from "Lida Kate" Killingsworth. She said she thought the Popes had lived up there.

The second day we went back to the Heath Place and looked for an old grave yard, north from the house on the same side of the road. It was located in the second field north on the west side, near some trees. We found no grave markers, only grave size depressions in the soil. (Here Ben Young displayed some amazing capabilities with his dowsing rods. He not only can locate subterranean bodies

but can find penknives and such, even when buried in the grass out in the fields. He did it twice for us.)

Stopping on our way to Leesburg, we walked over the fields near now, long-gone Starkville, where that town's cemetery was. Only a few stones remain, all ur known to us.

Later in the day we drove up to Smithville to look at the Stackhouse - Davis place where Robert F. Pope said his father, "Major" John Hillsman Pope had run a camp for Confederate recruits during the Civil War years (see Lee County book). Mrs. Jesse Davis, his grandmother, owned the plantation then. As near as Ray and I can figure, this grandmother of Robert F. Pope was Mary Frances Gilbert Pope's mother who had remarried (to Jesse Davis). From Mr. "Neck" Davis, who owns the land and lives in Smithville proper, we learned that the old "Big House" had been where the present occupant has a trailer-type home built among some old pecan trees. There is an old sycamore out front. We rode around the fields on the place and were able to find traces of the asphalt runways of the World War II landing field. Even these traces would be gone except that the air field personnel used it for a scrap repository. All the rest of the fields have been returned to cultivation.

As the day waned we were back in Smithville, talking with "Neck Davis", a man of 76 years. He pinpointed the location of an old grave yard that was near the "Big House." It can be ascertained by standing on the front porch of the trailer-house, facing the road and looking 75 yards diagonally left across the farm road. The gravestones were "bulldozed" when they created the air field.

While talking to Mr. Davis, we told him that our Great-Uncle Robert F. Pope had demolished the old buildings prior to the building of the air field. He then remarked that he didn't know of any Popes still residing in the county. He mentioned, however, that he had once known a "Boy" Pope.

I remembered seeing Robert "Boy" Pope mentioned in the Lee County Book index. I didn't think he was our Uncle Robert especially when he was described as a 'sort'a wild fellow."

Later, back at Ben's house, his lovely wife Faith induced us to come in for a final cup of coffee. Ben then called "Lida Kate" Killingsworth and asked her if she had ever known of Robert "Boy" Pope. She replied, "I should say so; I was married to him." In no time at all, we knew for sure that she had indeed married 'Uncle" Robert in 1933, the second of her three husbands. When she told of his first wife, Emma Deese, who is buried in the Pope lot at the Leesburg Cemetery, there was no doubt that she was our (former) Great-Aunt by marriage. Incidentally, if her husband Robert was living today, he would be 118 years old.

On day three we did some exploring on our own as Ben had some affairs to

attend to in Albany. First, we visited "Lida Kate" in her small apartment off Kinchafoonee Drive. It was such a thrill to see the lady who had been married to our grandfather's brother.

She described Uncle Robert as a very generous, hard-working man who made lots of money but couldn't hold on to it. The only name she addressed him by was "Mr. Pope." (He was 30 years her senior.) They lived in the white frame house, still extant, across the road from Ben's house. It is next to and north of the "Bass House." It belonged then, when she and "Uncle Robert" lived there, to her brother Reid Arnold. They lived rent free, but "Uncle" Robert didn't keep the taxes paid, causing Reid to lose the house.

Prompted by the description given us of a "wild" "Boy" Pope, we asked if he had a temper. This got a definite affirmative and she added, "He even killed a man, once." She said that he was a black man.

We asked about the saw mill run by "Boy" Pope (Lee County Book). She said, "Yes," and mentioned locations near Philema and Red Bone.

She remembered our mother, Sara Pope, as a fine young lady who worked "a long time" as a telephone operator in Leesburg at a now gone building next to the track at the main intersection on Walnut Avenue.

She also well remembered our grandmother ("Miss Dele") who she said made her wedding dress.

Later day romps took us to the woods near the Chehaw Monument looking for the Pope's cemetery (no luck).

We then took the metal detector and using Susan Wilson's map, walked down the dirt road traces of the Old Leslie Road, past a yellow frame house to a point where the old road crossed the Muckalee Creek. About 75 yards south of the old crossing we found some masses of concrete and brick that could have been building ruins. Here in the Civil War days stood the Pope tannery, where shoes for the plantation dwellers and Southern soldiers were reportedly made. Non descript metal traces were found all about. One could not put a date on any of the artifac noted.

We never learned any new information about our grandmother's parents, the Caramores, or those of "Raz" Godwin, but we counted our trip a very worthwhile one thanks especially to the kindness and interest of Faith and Ben Young and of cours to - "Lida Kate"!

Even the revelations about Uncle Robert's faults didn't upset us a bit. I sti remember how my mother, Sara Pope Martin, always spoke with the warmest affection of "MY UNCLE ROBERT" and how sad she was when she learned of his death in the 1950's.